(c) the investment likely to be made for the development of these blocks?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI SANTOSH GANGWAR): (a) Since operationalisation of New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) the Government have signed Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) for 70 exploration blocks, *i.e.* 16 blocks situated in onland, 30 blocks in shallow water offshore and 24 blocks in deept water area, with National Oil Companies and Private Companies, either singly or in consortium with other companies, under the three rounds of NELP for exploration and production of crude oil and natural gas. The onland blocks are situated in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

(b) The Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH) monitors the exploration activities as per the work programme given in respective PSCs and this monitoring is reviewed by the Government from time to time.

(c) Exploration being probabilistic in nature, no definite outcome therefrom can be predicted. Also, as per the terms of the PSCs the contractor has the option to walkout at the end of each of the three exploration phases, provided the minimum work programme for that phase has been completed. Hence, no estimate of investment to be made for development of these blocks can be done. However, the estimated investment for exploration of these blocks as indicated by the awardee companies in their bids is US $ 2,973 million (about Rs. 14567 Crores).

Malpractice in supply of LPG cylinders

†1338. SHRI RAMA SHANKER KAUSHIK: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to refer to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the illegal trade of smaller cylinders is going on in connivance with Government machinery and the domestic cylinders supplies are underweighted; and

(b) whether Government have taken any step so far in this regard; so the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor and action proposed to be taken in this direction?

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†Original notice ot the question was received in Hindi.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI SANTOSH GANGWAR): (a) and (b) Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) are marketing 5 kg small gas LPG cylinders for domestic purpose in rural and hilly areas, as per the scheme approved by the Government for low income group customers. OMCs have not reported any illegal sale of small gas cylinders.

Further, LPG distributors of OMCs are under strict instructions to supply the cylinders of right quantity and quality to their customers. The Oil Company Officials carry out random checks at distributors' godown, delivery point as well as enroute to ensure that no pilferage takes place. On the establishment of complaint of supply of under-weight cylinders to customers, action against erring distributors is taken in terms of Marketing Discipline Guidelines and/or Distributionship Agreement.

Delay in exploration of oil and gas in North-Eastem Region

1339. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the exploration of oil and natural gas in the North-Eastern Region has recently received a set-back;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor; and

(c) the steps proposed to be taken to remove the hurdles in the way of fast exploration of oil in the region?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI SANTOSH GANGWAR): (a) to (c) There has been no recent set-back in the exploration of hydrocarbons in North-Eastern Region. Appropriate measures as warranted by the prevalent situation in the region have been taken.

Special dividends by oil companies

1340. SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Govemment have asked the Public Sector Oil companies to declare special dividends of about Rs. 6,000 crore in the current financial year to augment the revenue shortfall;